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ABSTRACT

Sustainability is a critical issue for the vast array of community initiatives that promote healthy children, strong families, and safe communities. Noting that sustaining an initiative over time requires maintaining sufficient fiscal resources as well as a combination of nonfiscal resources from the initiative itself and the broader community, this brief presents a framework for sustainability. The eight-part framework is intended to help policymakers, program developers, and other stakeholders at the state and community levels identify the basic resources needed and address the strategic decisions necessary to sustain promising comprehensive community initiatives. The eight elements of the framework presented are: (1) vision; (2) results orientation; (3) strategic financing orientation; (4) adaptability to changing conditions; (5) broad base of community support; (6) key champions; (7) strong internal systems; and (8) sustainability plan. Each element of the framework is examined in detail and includes strategies for developing and strengthening it. Examples of how successful initiatives have implemented efforts to achieve one or more elements of sustainability are also provided. The brief concludes with considerations for decision makers who are working to achieve long-term stability and success. (Contains 11 resources.) (KB)

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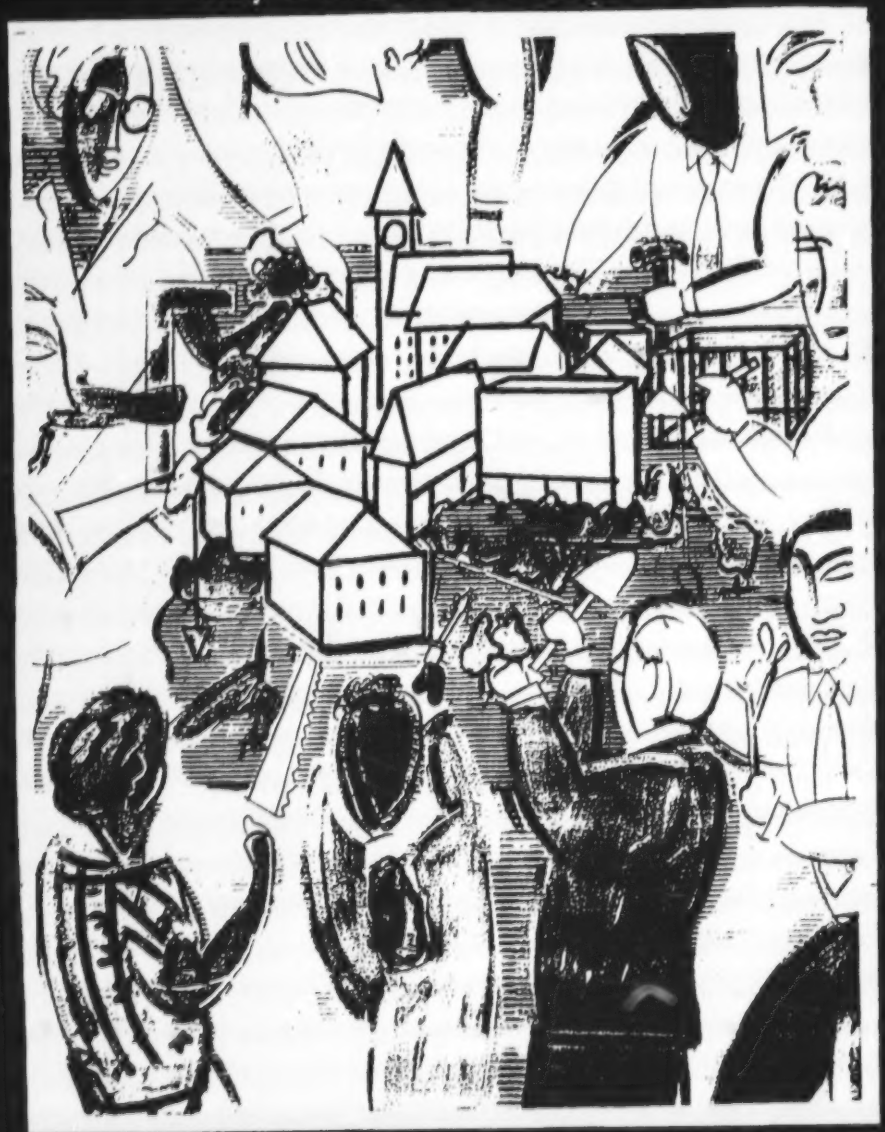
Sustaining Comprehensive Community Initiatives

Key Elements for Success

ED 467 066



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The FINANCE PROJECT

Sustaining Comprehensive Community Initiatives

Key Elements for Success

Sustainability is a critical issue for the vast array of community initiatives that promote healthy children, strong families, and safe communities. These initiatives, which encompass everything from state or community-wide system building efforts to local direct service programs, face similar challenges. Due to time-limited grants and narrow categorical funding streams, program developers must constantly search for new funding that will enable them to continue and/or expand on their initiatives. Repeatedly, program developers, community organizers, political leaders or others who invest resources in community initiatives ask the question, "How do we build a stable base of support to sustain effective initiatives over time?"

Many stakeholders involved in building these community initiatives pursue the answer to the above question by focusing solely on developing fiscal resources that will continue to support their efforts. And although long-term sustainability planning must necessarily include a focus on funding, it depends upon much more than just maintaining sufficient fiscal resources. Sustaining an initiative over time also requires a combination of nonfiscal resources from the initiative itself and the broader community. Necessary internal resources include: leadership from management and board members; access to technical expertise from within the organization; and the

existence of strong administrative and financial management systems. Critical external resources include: support from policymakers, the public, or other key stakeholders; access to technical expertise from outside the organization; and engagement of community-based organizations, parents, or other community members.

While much attention is focused on sustainability planning as an activity set apart from others, the work of sustainability planning is, in fact, central to the management of a successful initiative. The key elements of sustainability are the factors that contribute to the successful development and day-to-day operation of an initiative. Yet, as anyone running an initiative knows, success and sustainability do not happen automatically. They are the result of a complex process and hard work.

To address the broad array of issues associated with the support and continuation of effective community initiatives, The Finance Project created a sustainability framework that outlines several key elements important for achieving long-term program stability and success. Developed, refined, and retested over time, this conceptual framework provides a context for those involved in building community initiatives to begin to think about how to plan for sustainability in both the short- and the long-term. It borrows from the experiences of those who manage community initiatives, as well as the expertise of those who create policies for these initiatives. It is a compilation of various principles and strategies used by effective initiatives. However, the strategies that individual initiatives use to achieve sustainability often vary depending on the social, political, economic and even geographic factors in their communities. For instance, a particular initiative may focus more of its efforts on bolstering certain elements of sustainability and less on others. It all depends on the needs of the individual initiatives and their

communities at a given time. The sustainability framework is able to address these variations because it is a dynamic, rather than static, model that must be applied to the unique needs and circumstances of individual community initiatives.

This strategy brief presents The Finance Project's eight-part sustainability framework. It is intended to help policymakers, program developers and other stakeholders at both state and community levels identify the basic resources needed and address the strategic decisions necessary to sustain promising comprehensive community initiatives. This brief is designed to assist a range of stakeholders, regardless of their initiatives' programmatic focus. This includes those who are involved with community development programs, early childhood programs, youth development programs, out-of-school time programs or any other type of community-based program that serves the needs of children and families.

Achieving Sustainability: Eight Critical Elements for Success

This section describes the eight elements that constitute the sustainability framework. These elements are critical for achieving a stable base of fiscal and nonfiscal resources that, in turn, can help lead to long-term sustainability of community initiatives. Although each element is important, initiative leaders and stakeholders will need to determine the "critical mass" of elements that must be in place for their particular program to continue and thrive. While initiatives will have unique goals and strategies for developing the needed resources that will help achieve sustainability, the following components are key to most successful initiatives and can help guide efforts to develop both short- and long-term sustainability strategies.

In brief, the eight elements are:

1. Vision: Having a clear-cut objective that articulates how an initiative's programs or activities will improve the lives of children, families and communities is one of the most important and basic steps involved in achieving sustainability. Without articulating these objectives and developing a plan for achieving them, no initiative can be truly viable.

2. Results Orientation: Demonstrating program success through measurable results (e.g., established indicators and performance measures) is crucial for building support from key stakeholders in the community. Stakeholder support, in turn, increases the likelihood of program continuance.

3. Strategic Financing Orientation: Developing a strategic financing orientation is critical for program leaders. It enables them to identify the resources they need to sustain their activities and then develop strategies to bring these resources together to achieve their goals.

4. Adaptability to Changing Conditions: Adjusting to changing social, economic, and political trends in the community enables initiatives to take advantage of various opportunities that can help to achieve sustainability. Making these adjustments also allows initiatives to identify and overcome any external threats that could obstruct program continuance.

5. Broad Base of Community Support: Achieving a broad base of community support means determining who within the community loves an initiative, who needs it and who would care if it were gone. Often, when an initiative is able to build a broad base of supporters who care about it and believe it is vital, fiscal and non-fiscal support will follow.

6. Key Champions: Rallying leaders from businesses, faith-based institutions, government and other parts of the community who are committed to an initiative's vision and are willing to use their power and prestige to generate support for that program will help to ensure long-term stability.

7. Strong Internal Systems: Building strong internal systems, such as fiscal management, accounting, information, personnel systems and governance structures, enables an initiative to work effectively and efficiently. Establishing these systems also allows initiatives to document their results and demonstrate their soundness to potential funders.

8. Sustainability Plan: Creating sustainability plans helps initiative developers and managers clarify where they want their initiatives to go in the future. They provide benchmarks for determining whether initiatives are successfully reaching their goals. They also help policymakers, opinion leaders and investors decide whether and how to support certain initiatives.

Collectively, these elements are key to achieving a stable base of resources for community-based initiatives. Although all of the elements are important, it is not imperative to have all eight fully in place to achieve sustainability. The emphasis placed on each element and/or amount of time dedicated to a particular element will vary according to the needs and resources of the individual initiative or community. For example, initiative leaders may not need to dedicate much time to establishing an identity within the community because they have already cultivated a very broad base of community support. However, they may need to focus a considerable amount of time on shoring up their internal systems. In addition, there is no predetermined order in which these elements should be pursued, although some do naturally occur before others. For instance, it is important to have a clear vision before deciding what financing strategies are most appropriate. But, other elements are not sequential and will need to be pursued simultaneously. For example, initiative leaders will need to cultivate relationships with key community leaders not as a last step, but rather in conjunction with efforts to develop financing strategies and build a broad base of community support.

The remainder of this brief examines each of the elements of the sustainability framework in detail, first by defining the element and then illustrating strategies for developing and strengthening it. The brief also provides examples of how specific initiatives have successfully implemented efforts to achieve one or more elements of sustainability. And finally, the brief presents considerations for decision makers who are working to achieve long-term stability and success.

1. Vision

Possessing a clear and compelling vision of what an initiative intends to achieve is the first step toward getting there. If the vision is well conceived and if

SAN DIEGO'S VISION OF PROVIDING UNIVERSAL BEFORE- AND AFTER-SCHOOL SERVICES COMES TO FRUITION IN THE SAN DIEGO 6 TO 6 INITIATIVE

The city of San Diego, in cooperation with the San Diego Unified School District, is rapidly achieving its vision of providing universal before-and after-school services to every public elementary and middle school student within its jurisdiction. Leaders of the San Diego 6 to 6 initiative (who oversee management of the city's before-and after-school programs) are fulfilling this vision with the critical support of a key champion, the implementation of sound financing strategies, and the generation of a broad base of community support.

In 1995, the mayor of San Diego initiated the Safe Schools Task Force, which included the mayor, the superintendent of schools, school principals, the county juvenile court judge, juvenile probation officers, the city manager, the city attorney and the chief of police. This task force developed a set of recommendations that included a vision to open schools in the city before and after the traditional school day and to provide academic support and social enrichment programs to students during the hours when most parents work.

Upon the recommendations of the task force, the mayor requested city funding to launch a before-and after-school program, which would operate from "6 to 6" (hence, the name of the initiative). The mayor was successful in securing city general funds for the program, and her vision and leadership served as the catalyst that pulled together other major stakeholders in the community to support the initiative. These stakeholders, including representatives from the city, county, school districts, school boards, PTA, community-based organizations, parents and youth, formed the San Diego Regional After-School Consortium. The consortium has worked to bring additional funding and attention to school programs and issues in the region.

No single entity could have created and operated San Diego's 6 to 6 on its own. The presence of a collaborative vision engaged all stakeholders.

Contact: Deb Ferrin, Child Care Coordinator for the City of San Diego, (619) 533.6511, dferrin@sandiego.gov.

there is buy-in from initiative leaders, staff and the community, supporters of that initiative can and will go to great lengths to bring it to realization. Vision is what keeps initiatives moving forward, even in the face of discouraging odds. But if vision is lacking or there is insufficient buy-in, no amount of additional resources will be able to generate support.

The process of developing a vision involves numerous factors. To start, initiative leaders and stakeholders need to determine the specific results that they would like to achieve in the short-term and into the future. They must also understand how the initiative currently fits within the larger community and agree on how it should fit in the years to come. This requires examining the community's needs and determining whether and how their initiative meets those needs.

Considerations:

- Defining an initiative's particular niche—what distinguishes it from others and how it works in conjunction with others—is key to formulating a vision and getting members of the community to buy into that vision.
- It is important to encourage the involvement of program leaders and stakeholders in the process of creating or clarifying a vision. Engaging a broad range of community partners will increase the likelihood of support.
- The ability of initiative leaders and staff, as well as other relevant stakeholders, to articulate the initiative's vision is crucial to ensuring that the vision is shared and supported by the community.
- Developing a shared vision takes time, but it often becomes the glue that holds initiatives together

and keeps them moving forward. Initiative leaders should invest the time necessary to reach consensus and formulate a shared vision.

2. Results Orientation

Around the country, initiative leaders have increasingly begun to focus on providing services that produce good results for children, families and communities. This national orientation toward results reflects the need of policymakers, program developers and community leaders to demonstrate that the programs and services that they create and offer to children and families have their intended impact, are effective in terms of cost, and are worthy of continuation.

RESULTS, INDICATORS AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

A **result** is a broad condition of well-being for children, adults, families or communities. Results are sometimes known as outcomes.

An **indicator** is a measure for which data are available, which helps quantify the achievement of the desired result for community-wide populations.

A **performance measure** is a measure for which data are available, which helps quantify movement towards the indicator for specific target populations OR that measures the level of activity, efficiency, capacity or quality of a service or intervention.

In order to demonstrate results, initiatives must develop indicators and performance measures that track the progress of their work. They are used by successful initiatives to monitor whether their efforts are productive and their funds are well spent. The process of regularly measuring progress toward goals can provide program leaders and potential funders with information on what works for whom, under what circumstances, within what time frames, and with what costs. By measuring progress toward goals, program leaders can also establish accountability within the community and to existing or potential funders, showing that they use limited resources effectively.[1]

LOGIC MODELS

A logic model is a framework that shows the relationship between an initiative's ultimate aim (its results) and the activities it is pursuing to get there, along with how it will measure progress along the way. A logic model also reflects an initiative's "theory of change"—its beliefs about what affects the indicators and performance measures it cares about, and what works to improve them.

Considerations:

- More often than not, initiatives work in tandem with schools, families and other community-based organizations to improve results for the people they serve. Therefore, individual initiatives should not be held solely accountable for global results such as improving students' overall academic performance. It is important that initiative leaders set realistic expectations for program activities and outcomes that demonstrate how their activities contribute to overall community results.
- Developing indicators with interim goals allows programs to show progress over time and to determine if they are on the right track.
- Being results oriented is more than simply collecting and analyzing data—it involves using data to continuously improve the program's activities. Data should be constantly analyzed to determine if the program is moving in a direction that will help it to achieve its mission.
- Sharing results with the community and funders requires that initiative leaders develop channels of communication such as publishing newsletters, submitting stories to local newspapers and organizing events to spread the word

THE OREGON COMMISSION ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES (OCCF) IS ORIENTED TOWARD RESULTS

The Oregon Commission on Children and Families is a partnership of citizens and professionals working together to improve the lives of children and families of Oregon's local communities. OCCF works in partnership with 36 County Commissions on Children and Families to support local coordinated comprehensive planning for all children and families. OCCF promotes system integration and provides leadership for local and state efforts focused on early childhood issues and programs.

OCCF is geared toward results. At the state level, the commission is legislatively mandated to ensure accountability for the support of prevention services to children and families. Every two years, a statewide commission reviews each local commission's programmatic outcomes to determine if conditions are improving for children and families. Based on whether outcomes are appropriate, the state commission negotiates a two-year contract with each local commission. Local commissions also negotiate contracts with service providers that specify the outcomes and performance standards they are expected to achieve for each service. They report on outcomes quarterly through an Internet-based database. In addition, they report on internal control measures that track fiscal and managerial responsibilities. Local commissions also use logic models to develop their strategies, outputs and intermediate outcomes.

Contact: Mickey Lansing, OCCF Deputy Director, (503) 373.1283, mickey_lansing@class.oregonvos.net.

about program activities. Sharing the news about positive outcomes can help to garner support from members of the surrounding community.

3. Strategic Financing Orientation

In many cases, the outcomes that leaders seek for children, families and communities cannot be achieved without bringing together resources in new ways.[7] Having a strategic financing orientation means that initiative leaders know what they want to sustain, what resources they need to sustain their activities and how to access those resources; and have identified strategies to put those resources together in order to achieve their goals.

To develop a strategic financing orientation, initiative leaders should consider a range of financing options. These options may include the following: making the best use of existing resources (monetary and in-kind); maximizing available sources of funding from public and private sources; creating more flexibility in existing categorical funding; generating new resources by engaging public and private sector partners; and advocating for new state and local revenue sources. Strategic financing also requires that initiative leaders create a diversified portfolio of funding sources that are aligned with specific purposes. For example, capital financing, service subsidies, staff support, management infrastructure and evaluation may each call for different sources of support. A diversified funding portfolio that includes public and private sources also can provide a buffer from inevitable changes in funders' fiscal priorities.

Considerations:

- Initiative leaders need to take account of changing fiscal needs over the life cycle of their programs. Decisions about which sources and strategies to pursue should be based on a careful analysis of short- and long-term funding needs.
- Typically, successful initiatives incorporate multiple funding sources that cut across traditionally separate services and programs. Making the most of available funds requires combining public and private sector resources in innovative ways to create a funding portfolio of specialized and flexible

short-term and long-term funding that is focused on the community's needs and priorities for children, youth and families.

- One of the most important principles of effective financing is to recognize that the resources necessary to build and sustain community programs may come in a variety of forms and from many sources. In-kind resources, including volunteer staff, contributed space, donated equipment and technical support, are just as valuable as funding and can significantly extend the total resources a community has to invest in children, youth and their families.

WASHINGTON, D.C.'S STOKES SCHOOL EXPANDS AND IMPROVES OUT-OF-SCHOOL-TIME PROGRAMS THROUGH STRATEGIC FINANCING

When the Elsie Whitlow Stokes Community Freedom Public Charter School of Washington, D.C., began in 1998, it recognized the need to provide a safe haven for its students during out-of-school hours. In response to this need, the school created a before- and after-school program that houses students from 7:30 until 8:30 a.m. and from 3:30 until 6:00 p.m. In 1998, approximately 15 students participated in the program. This year, the program has grown to five times the initial size. The school achieved this tremendous growth through the implementation of a strategic financing plan that includes a diverse array of monetary and in-kind resources.

During the first year of the program, the Stokes School relied primarily on student fees to maintain out-of-school time (OST) activities. With these funds, the program operated with a staff of one and offered academic assistance to students as well as providing them with some play-time activities and snacks. Today, the program has seven full-time staff. It still relies, in part, on student fees to support program activities. The fees are set on a sliding scale and those families that are unable to pay the fees volunteer their services to the program. In addition to the student fees, numerous other funding sources help to maintain the school's OST program. The Stokes School is the lead school in a coalition of charter schools in Washington, D.C., which recently received a 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) grant. These funds, as well as Title I funds, support the salaries of six of the full-time OST staff. This staff offers academic assistance to students as well as a variety of extra curricular activities including art, conflict resolution, science, nutrition, strategy games, reading, music, Spanish, French and computer science. The 21st CCLC funds also pay the salaries of eight Bell Foundation employees who provide intensive tutoring to students who require extra academic assistance. In addition, 10 Georgetown University students volunteer tutoring services to students who need regular homework assistance. A federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant pays for an OST coordinator who manages all of the program's activities.

In addition to accessing multiple funding sources to support staff salaries, the Stokes School uses a variety of other resources to sustain OST activities. The school uses USDA funds to provide students with nutritious meals and snacks before and after school. Also, in collaboration with Public Allies, a nonprofit community organization, the Stokes School has embarked upon a year-long, school-wide community service-learning project that focuses on hunger and food sustainability. Public Allies is providing a nutrition curriculum for the program and also subsidizes the salaries of two part-time OST staff. Other community organizations, including the Washington Tennis Center and D.C. Scores, donate in-kind services to the school's OST programs, including tennis lessons and literacy classes. In the future, Stokes School leaders plan to further diversify their funding resources by applying for Child Care and Development funds granted from the federal government to the District of Columbia.

Contact: Linda Moore, Stokes School Founder and Executive Director, (202) 265.7237, LindaM@ewstokes.org.

4. *Adaptability to Changing Conditions*

The world is constantly changing. Political leaders and programs come and go, neighborhoods and populations change and so do the priorities of communities and initiatives that serve children and families. Policy changes are often a reflection of a shift in priorities. Therefore, in this rapidly changing environment, it is important that initiative leaders be aware of changes that may have an effect on their activities.

Adaptability to changing conditions involves strategic thinking about trends in the field and the community served. The most successful initiatives are those whose leaders are adept at anticipating, influencing and effectively responding to new opportunities or threats in their environment (e.g., those who are able to take advantage of developing resources or those who survive negative circumstances such as a recession or a political transition). This involves keeping abreast of current research in the field and data on the economic, demographic and social conditions of the community. It also means using that research to contribute to and help shape policy at the local, state and national level. An initiative's ability to track, contribute and adapt to changing policy environments, and position itself to respond to national, state and local decision makers' priorities, is critical to sustainability.[3]

Considerations:

- Programs can keep abreast of changing policy developments with limited time and effort by joining coalitions with other groups that serve children and families, signing onto listservs that disseminate up-to-date information, and subscribing to relevant publications.

THE FUND FOR A HEALTHY MAINE ADAPTS TO CHANGING POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

One recent policy development that many states, communities and initiatives across the country have begun to respond to and access is the availability of tobacco settlement money. Starting in December 1999, the tobacco industry began to issue payments to states which are projected to total $250 billion over 25 years. Most states began making decisions on the management and allocation of the tobacco settlement revenues during their 1999 and 2000 legislative sessions and will continue to make decisions on how to use those funds for many years to come.

In the state of Maine, politicians and community advocates for children and families tracked these new fiscal developments and were well positioned to respond to them at the appropriate time. In 1999, the Maine Legislature passed an appropriations bill that established the Fund for a Healthy Maine and the Trust Fund for a Healthy Maine. The Fund for a Healthy Maine receives 90 percent of the state's tobacco settlement dollars and the remaining 10 percent is deposited in the Trust for a Healthy Maine. The fund used these tobacco dollars to support a variety of family and children's services, including:

- child care subsidies for children up to age 15;
- school services for youth ages 12 to 15;
- incentives for child care providers to offer care during odd hours, in underserved geographic areas, and to at-risk children with special needs; and
- grants to communities and schools to reduce tobacco addiction and use and resulting disease in all populations in the state, with a focus on those at highest risk, such as youth and disadvantaged populations.

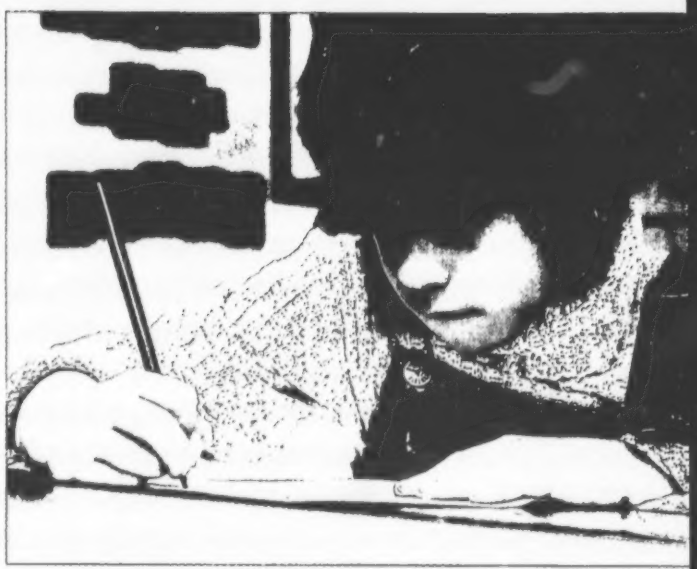
Contact: Lucky Holiander, Start ME Right c/o Youth Alternatives, (207) 874.1175, lhollander@youthalternatives.org.

- Successful initiatives do not wait until new policy developments arise to adapt to them. Those initiatives that weather the winds of change plan for those changes far in advance. Engaging in a strategic planning process that involves examining an array of possible obstacles and opportunities that the initiative may encounter in the future will help leaders adapt to those conditions as they arise.

5. *Broad Base of Community Support*

Broad-based community support is vital to the long-term sustainability of community initiatives. These programs are much more likely to achieve their purposes when stakeholders actively support their goals and activities. Stakeholders include local business, political and community leaders, as well as others with a vested interest in children's well-being. Most importantly, because children, youth and families are the ultimate recipients of services offered by these programs, their support of and participation in community-based initiatives is critical to their continued existence.

In order to achieve a broad base of community support, initiatives must establish a strong identity in the community. This involves opening the initiative's doors to the neighboring areas and providing opportunities for interested parties to become more familiar with the initiative's mission and activities. For example, initiatives sometimes organize open house events as a vehicle to allow community members to become more knowledgeable about their missions and activities. Nurturing a positive relationship with the media to spread the word about the initiative will also ensure that it maintains a high profile within the community. Other useful approaches to garner and maintain a broad base of community support include: involving business executives and other local leaders in the governance of the initiative; and engaging stakeholders in the planning, implementation and evaluation of program activities.



The power of broad-based community support cannot be underestimated. In many instances, the community has come to the rescue of a popular initiative, rallying to prevent funding cuts or to support increases in funding amounts. When the community views an initiative as a vital support and expresses that view clearly and strategically, funding will often follow.

Considerations:

- Initiatives can find new voices of support in the community by working in partnership with other community organizations that serve the same population. Working in partnership with these organizations not only increases a program's visibility in the community, but also demonstrates how it effectively collaborates with organizations that share its vision.
- Initiative leaders should think creatively about how community members can best support the initiative's work and make contributing easy. To facilitate community involvement and support, initiative leaders should be clear about what they want community members to contribute and play to their strengths. For example, community leaders might suggest that lawyers offer pro bono legal services, contractors provide time and materials, and physicians donate health-screening services.

- Developing leadership skills among parents and other stakeholders who can advocate for policies and services is a proactive strategy for building community support for programs. These are often the most outspoken members of the community and can be initiatives' greatest advocates.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS GENERATE A BROAD BASE OF SUPPORT THROUGH COMMUNITY OUTREACH

On a yearly basis, the Early Childhood Alliance of the Family Resource Network in Mercer County, West Virginia, holds a Kiddie Fair that brings together more than 300 families with service providers, business representatives, members of the board of education and scores of community volunteers. Families arrive at the Kiddie Fair in buses donated by the local Head Start center, are greeted by a community volunteer, and receive a map identifying the fair's booths, services and activities. For example, after receiving information on how to identify a high quality child care setting, families can move on to learn about Head Start, preschools and family day care settings. Parents can have their children immunized by local health department nurses or screened for developmental growth, vision, hearing and speech problems. If concerns arise during the screening, parents are immediately directed to the appropriate agency's booth and can talk to a qualified professional to plan any follow-up appointments that may be necessary.

To ensure that getting information, support and services is also fun, a face painter, storyteller and fitness trainer volunteer their time to keep children and their parents smiling. To make sure they want to come back next year, children leave with goodie bags filled with crayons, donated toys and resource and referral information for their parents.

The coordinator of the Family Resource Network sees this kind of event as critical to a rural community, where access to services is difficult and people do not have enough information about what kinds of services are available to them and their children. This type of event is beneficial both to the families in need of services and the initiatives that need to gain visibility within the community.

Contact: Brenda Donithan, Early Childhood Alliance Chair, (304) 324.0456, mercerlhd@wvdhhr.org.

6. Key Champions

Key champions are leaders from business, faith-based institutions, government and other individuals from the community who are committed to a program's vision and are willing to use their power and prestige to generate support and focus community resources and energy. Champions can bring visibility to initiatives by obtaining media attention through public service announcements, press conferences, letters to the editor and opinion pieces. They can also recruit other leaders to invest time and resources into an initiative.

Key champions can be vital forces in generating public will, garnering increased resources from public and private sources, and convincing state and local governments to establish supportive public policies. Advocates who lend their voices and clout in support of an initiative can make the difference between long-term success and failure.

Considerations:

- It is important for initiative leaders to be strategic when calling upon champions. Selections should be based on the audience that the initiative is attempting to reach. For example, if initiative leaders want to reach business leaders, then they might seek a champion from the business community. If the target audience is

A KEY CHAMPION FOR NORTH CAROLINA'S SMART START INITIATIVE

The North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC) is a statewide nonprofit organization that oversees the daily operations and accountability of 81 Smart Start partnerships that serve children and families in all of North Carolina's 100 counties. Ashley Thrift, chairman of the board of NCPC, is a true advocate and a strong voice for the state's children. Thrift is a partner with a law firm in Winston-Salem, N.C. His volunteer work on behalf of children in the state of North Carolina has been extensive. He began his work with Smart Start as co-chair of the Forsyth Early Childhood Partnership and became chairman of the North Carolina Partnership for Children board in 1996. Thrift is also the former chief of staff and counsel to U.S. Senator Ernest F. Hollings, where he was active in many legislative activities, particularly education and those surrounding programs for children and families such as the WIC program and Head Start.

Thrift's wisdom and direction has led to a robust and sustained Smart Start program that continues to ensure that North Carolina's children enter school ready to learn. With the assistance of key champions like Thrift, Smart Start has received more than $70 million in private support from North Carolina's business sector and foundations and more than 1 million volunteer hours to support the effort since its inception.

Because of his extensive volunteer work on behalf of NCPC, Thrift received North Carolina's highest civilian honor, the Order of the Long Leaf Pine. North Carolina's governor presents this award to individuals who have a proven record of service and have made long-standing contributions to their community.

Contact: Monica Dodd, NCPC Program Coordinator, (919) 821.7999, mhdood@smartstart-nc.org.

neighborhood mothers, then initiative leaders might seek an outspoken mother from the community. Based on this decision, initiative leaders can devise an outreach plan to engage these key champions and also a follow-up plan to maintain their support.

- Many key champions are people who have something in common with the cause for which an initiative stands. Researching the backgrounds and interest of high profile community leaders may enable an initiative to find the hook that will get those leaders involved in an initiative's activities and maintain their active engagement over time.
- When attracting key champions, initiative leaders should keep in mind that champions can bring more than just monetary benefits to a program. Often the visibility that key champions bring to initiatives can be much more valuable than the money that they contribute.

7. *Strong Internal Systems*

Quality programs cannot exist without strong internal systems. Strong internal systems establish policies and procedures that are based on generally accepted standards and best practices. These systems help to insure that the programs delivered are of high quality and meet the needs of the community and participants. Such systems include accounting and auditing procedures, procurement and personnel procedures, information systems, governance structures and management systems. Strong internal systems are also necessary to maintain accountability and quality control over work. Through careful documentation of work quality, good internal systems can help demonstrate to program supporters that initiatives have effective leadership and high quality staff who can achieve the goals that they have set for themselves.

Maintaining good internal systems also requires the support and dedication of talented management, staff and board. Support for these systems is often garnered

when all parties involved understand and accept their roles and responsibilities for maintaining the systems. Therefore, communication processes should be put in place to ensure that staff, management and board members are kept informed of the current status of internal financial and administrative affairs and are also alerted to emerging concerns.

Considerations:

- Data from internal systems can provide the information needed to constantly refine an initiative and its services. By regularly monitoring information and data, changes can be made to continually strengthen efforts. Regularly scheduled meetings between initiative leaders, administrative staff and financial managers can alert initiative leaders to any impending financial or administrative problems. In the same way, internal audits, conducted by an initiative's staff, can help to identify areas and courses of action for improvement.
- Policies and procedures are important tools of communication between initiative leaders and staff members. Typically, these policies and procedures are presented to staff in the form of an employee handbook, procedural manual or other written resources that provide essential information for organizational operations. In order to ensure that staff understand their responsibilities, it is essential that initiative leaders provide them with clearly written and concise handbooks and other guides.
- Management information systems can facilitate the jobs of financial managers and administrators.

MISSOURI'S FAMILY AND COMMUNITY TRUST/CARING COMMUNITIES CREATES STRONG INTERNAL SYSTEMS

The Family and Community Trust (FACT) is a state level, public-private partnership in Missouri whose goal is to improve results for families and children in that state. FACT works in collaboration with and provides leadership to Caring Communities Partnerships (a state network of 21 community-based partnerships that provide supports and services to build and strengthen comprehensive community-based systems). In order to more effectively support the communities they serve, FACT and the Caring Communities Partnerships recognize the need for creating and maintaining strong, internal systems. To this end, they are working collaboratively to institute standard, reliable tools for managing their resources, documenting their work and reporting their results to state partners and other supporters.

In an effort to develop and strengthen their internal systems, FACT and Caring Communities have created a set of working teams whose purpose is to build effective information systems that can document and facilitate the sharing of information. These teams have developed specific information systems applications that include accomplishment reports, financial summary reports and socio-economic data. The working teams are also establishing a data mart into which local Caring Communities Partnerships can input information that documents the status and progress of their internal systems.

In collaboration with a group of consultants, FACT also recently embarked upon a project to design, develop and implement curricula and trainings on fiscal management and human resource management for the Caring Communities Partnerships. In addition to receiving general information on nonprofit fiscal and human resources management, the Partnerships also receive more specific information pertaining to relevant Missouri law and the contractual requirements governing Caring Communities Partnerships. FACT and the consultants also developed additional tools and materials, such as administrative manuals, that are intended to strengthen the Caring Communities Partnerships as effective community leadership organizations and collaboratives.

Contact: Lynn Tiede, FACT Senior Policy Associate, (314) 531.5505, ltiede@mofact.org.

There is an array of MIS packages available to perform numerous administrative and financial management tasks. However, these systems, like other administrative support systems, can be costly. Initiative leaders should carefully review the selection of packages available before choosing the one that best fits their initiative's needs.

8. Sustainability Plan

The final element in the sustainability framework is the sustainability plan. A sustainability plan brings together all of the elements previously addressed in this framework. It is a clear, sensible, convincing plan for putting together the key resources that are necessary for a program or initiative to continue. Good sustainability plans help the developers of programs and initiatives clarify where they are and where they want to go. They help policymakers, opinion leaders and investors decide whether and how to get on board. They help key audiences understand what the initiative is and why it is needed. They give program managers a road map for where they are going and benchmarks for determining whether they are successfully reaching their goals.

Developing a good sustainability plan involves sketching out a long-term map of what initiative leaders want to accomplish. This map should include strategies to obtain resources that will support the initiative. It should also identify challenges and obstacles that an initiative might encounter as it works to attain its goals, as well as strategies that may help to overcome these challenges.

Considerations:

- Issues of sustainability should be addressed as early in the life of an initiative as possible. Putting together a sustainability plan at the inception of an initiative is the ideal time; however, very rarely is this possible. The adage "better late than never" is very applicable to the development of sustainability plans.

- Developing a sustainability plan is a lot like developing a business plan. Starting a business requires a clear concept of how to creatively meet a market need and a plan for developing the resources to do it profitably. Creating and sustaining a promising community program or initiative similarly requires a clear concept of how to effectively address the critical needs of families and children and how to marshal the resources to make it happen. Each initiative has its own problems and opportunities and each must address distinct issues—much as each business venture does.

- The process of planning for sustainability is not complete once a sustainability plan has been developed. The plan should not be placed on a shelf to gather dust. By nature, sustainability plans are dynamic, rather than static, documents and should be continuously reviewed and revised to reflect the changing conditions in which initiatives operate.

THE MARYLAND AFTER SCHOOL OPPORTUNITY FUND CREATES A SUSTAINABILITY PLAN TO ENSURE LONG-TERM STABILITY

Established in 1999, the goal of the Maryland After School Opportunity Fund Program (MASOFP) is to improve the lives of Maryland's children by helping them to develop skills that will reinforce healthy behaviors and avoid negative behaviors. To achieve that goal, MASOFP does the following:

- provides grants to community groups that work with after-school programs;
- offers technical assistance and training to those groups;
- helps groups identify standards and develop measurement instruments;
- creates networking opportunities for local after-school programs;
- maintains a database of after-school providers; and
- engages in various other activities to support Maryland's after-school programs.

The Maryland Legislature created MASOFP and funded the initiative with $10 million dollars in "seed money." In creating the initiative, the Legislature also called on the MASOFP's leaders to look for additional funding and diversify the funding sources so that the initiative could maintain activities in the future. The MASOFP Advisory Board established a Sustainability and Promotions workgroup to investigate long-term funding for after-school programs in Maryland, and in July of 2001, MASOFP held a retreat to develop a sustainability plan. As a result of the retreat, MASOFP formulated a sustainability plan that identifies a number of strategies to assist with long-term sustainability. These include:

- ensuring quality after-school programs through:
  - ongoing evaluations of programs;
  - improved data collection;
  - interim indicators that measure short-term results;
  - an ongoing technical assistance and training workgroup; and
  - an ongoing evaluation workgroup.
- establishing ownership on the state level that will ensure the continuation of after-school programs;
- improving the communication of the vision for after-school programs;
- increasing political will and support for after-school programs in Maryland by:
  - educating legislators and others about after-school programs; and
  - assisting local management boards to connect with legislators, business leaders and others to increase knowledge and support for after-school programs.
- diversifying funding by:
  - establishing a small task force to map current available funding;
  - researching the possibility of requiring a cash match from local jurisdictions;
  - providing local community groups and after-school programs with technical assistance and training around fundraising;
  - encouraging local community groups to look for resources from other state programs; and
  - looking for private partners such as foundations, individuals and businesses.

Contact: Kerry Whitacre, Policy Advisor, Office of Maryland Lieutenant Governor, (410) 974.2570, kwhitacre@gov.state.md.us.

Conclusion

Sustainability is a challenge for all programs and initiatives that serve children, youth and families. Many programs that show promise in the start-up phase eventually fade away because they are unable to tap into and make the best use of the fiscal and community resources that could enable them to flourish. However, among the programs that do flourish, there are several common elements that lead to their success: a well-articulated vision of what initiative leaders want to achieve; the ability to document and demonstrate an initiative's success; the ability to adjust to changing social, economic and political trends in the community; support from policymakers and the public; the ability to identify and tap into necessary monetary and in-kind resources; the existence of strong administrative and fiscal management systems; the involvement of community-based organizations, parents or other stakeholders; and the existence of a clear, sensible and convincing plan for putting together the key resources that are necessary for an initiative to continue.

With thoughtful attention to the range of necessary resources outlined in this framework and a plan for securing those resources, comprehensive community initiatives can significantly increase their chances of achieving long-term success and stability.

Endnotes

1. For more information on results, indicators, performance measures and logic models, see The Finance Project's publications including: *Using Results to Improve the Lives of Children and Families: A Guide for Public-Private Child Care Partnerships* by Sara Watson (2000) and *A Guide to Successful Public-Private Partnerships for Out of School Time and Community School Initiatives* by Sharon Deich (2001).

2. For a fuller discussion and guide to The Finance Project's framework of financing strategies, see *Thinking Broadly: Financing Strategies for Comprehensive Child and Family Initiatives* by Cheryl D. Hayes (2002).

3. For an example of states' responses to a new funding opportunity, see The Finance Project's *Adapting to Changing Conditions: Accessing State Tobacco Revenue for Out-of School Time and Community School Initiatives,* by Carol Cohen and Victoria Wegener (2000).

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Resources on Sustaining Comprehensive Community Initiatives

The Finance Project Publications

A Guide to Successful Public-Private Partnerships for Out-of-School Time and Community School Initiatives, Deich, Sharon, 2001.

The Sustainability Workbook: A Guide for Developing Sustainability Plans, Flynn, Margaret, forthcoming.

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Creating More Comprehensive Community-Based Support Systems, Orland, Martin, Anna Danegger and Ellen Foley, 1995.

Using Results to Improve the Lives of Children and Families: A Guide for Public-Private Child Care Partnerships, Watson, Sara, 2000.

Other Publications

A Policy Approach to Create and Sustain Community Schools, Coalition of Community Schools, 2000.

Strategic Planning Workbook for Nonprofit Organizations, Wilder Foundation, 1997.

Building Circles of Support for Stronger Families: Sustaining the Program, Families and Schools Together, Alliance for Children and Families, 2000.

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The FINANCE PROJECT

1401 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 800, Washington, DC 20005 ~ T: 202.587.1000 F: 202.628.4205 ~ www.financeproject.org

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